

THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

25 July 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

1. The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) is an area of strategic importance to the United States. The islands flank the US forward defense perimeter and dominate the sea lanes to Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Retention of base rights in the area and in the adjacent unincorporated territory of Guam are an integral part of US forward defense planning. Domination of the TTPI by a foreign power would therefore directly affect US national security interests.

2. It has been suggested that, as a result of both internal sentiment and international pressures, the inhabitants of the Territory are likely to demand an early plebiscite through which they would seek to place themselves under the administration of their pre-war rulers, the Japanese. Available evidence does not support this view.

3. There has been considerable pressure within the United Nations for the granting of independence to the TTPI, one of only three areas remaining under UN trusteeship. These pressures come primarily from former colonial states and the Soviet Union. A UN-sponsored plebiscite could be one result of such pressures, particularly if a significant element among the TTPI inhabitants were to request it. Early this year a member of the Marianas delegation in the Congress of Micronesia did in fact tell the UN Visiting Mission that the people of the Marianas want a plebiscite no later than 1970. The Mission, however, during their February-March investigation made a special effort to test public opinion on this subject and found that very few inhabitants had a clear idea of the alternatives open to them; the most common reaction reported by the Mission was a desire for continuation of the trusteeship.

4. Should a plebiscite be held in the next three years, the most likely result would be a decision for association with the United States, rather than outright independence or association with some other power. The Marianas delegate who petitioned the UN Visiting Mission for a plebiscite, Senator Francisco T. Palacios, went on to say that "we have no doubt in our minds that we are ready to become an independent, unincorporated territory of the United States of America or a Commonwealth of the United States."

5. Educated Micronesians realize that independence is not economically feasible; this is also recognized by members of the UN Trusteeship Council. Senator Palacios, in the statement already referred to, observed that an independent Pacific Islands nation would have to seek foreign aid for even such needed public services as education and public health. Although in his opinion the US, the USSR, China, Japan, and perhaps other nations might offer such aid in return for economic concessions, he preferred unilateral association with one country--the United States--to diffused dependence on several.

6. Available evidence does not support a prediction that the Micronesians would choose Japan in a plebiscite. Some of the older islanders may like to remember the 1920s as the "good days" when, under Japanese administration, the islands experienced relative economic prosperity. At present there is probably some desire on the part of Japan for closer economic ties with the Territory in the fields of fishing and tourism, but such desires do not indicate a Japanese wish to annex and subsidize the area. Nor could Japan's air and naval assets provide protection for the islands.

7. Constructive development programs undertaken by the United States in recent years have done much to allay criticisms of the immediate post-war administration of the territory. Among the evidences of increased US concern visible to the inhabitants are expanded budget allocations, a more

vigorous administration, and the assignment of large numbers of Peace Corps Volunteers to the islands. Thus, although external pressures for the holding of a plebiscite may well grow, continued US efforts to generate political, social and particularly economic progress should leave little doubt as to where the best interests of the islanders lie in any future political association.

BASIC DATA

Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI)

Land Area: 687 square miles. (Some 2,141 islands in 97 "island units"; 64 islands regularly inhabited.)

Population: 92,373 (1966)

Major Ethnic Groups: Micronesian. Nine major languages, with regional dialect variations.

Sovereignty: US "strategic" trust territory.

Self-Government: Bicameral Congress of Micronesia; 6 Districts; 53 Chartered Municipalities.

Economy: Subsistence agriculture and fishing; copra main export; heavy trade imbalance.

Guam

Area: 209 square miles.

Population: 44,892 (1964) plus an estimated 30,000 military transients.

Major Ethnic Groups: Guamanian or Chamorro (basically Micronesian with admixture of Spanish, Mexican, and Filipino), 35,000. Filipino contract labor, 8,000 (1957).

Sovereignty: US unincorporated territory.

Self-Government: Local legislative autonomy; party system; US envisages full internal self-government on pre-statehood Hawaii/Alaska pattern.

Economy: Subsistence agriculture and heavy dependence on military base employment; heavy trade imbalance.

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Micronesia, or The Trust Territory of the Pacific  
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